



March 20, 2009

Dear Marlborough High School Parents:

Did you know that parental disapproval is the number one reason why teens choose not to drink? SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) has launched an initiative at our school and in our community that aims to reduce underage drinking in Marlborough by addressing student, parent, school, and community attitudes and policies regarding underage alcohol use. The campaign is funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security and was developed by ARGUS Communications and Education Development Center, Inc. with input from Marlborough High students, administrators, and parents and local law enforcement officials.

Because ***Underage Drinking Requires an Adult Response***, we need your help. As parents, you are still the most influential factor in your teen's life, and research shows that you play a crucial role in preventing underage drinking.

Included in this mailing you will find a tip sheet on what to do when your teen asks to go to a party, how to host a safe party for your teen at home, and fun, safe activities.

You may also visit www.sadd.org/parents for additional tools and resources.

Please e-mail any suggestions, questions, or concerns to masadd@sadd.org. We welcome your feedback. Thank you! And remember – ***Underage Drinking Requires an Adult Response!***

Sincerely,

Debra Roy, Marlborough High School Principal &
Marlborough High School SADD Chapter Students

sadd.org

This program is funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security.

Safety belts save lives – please remember to buckle up!



House Party

Graduation Celebrations Often Leave Teens at Risk

By Stephen Wallace, M.S. Ed.



High school commencements will soon mark a time of pomp, circumstance ... and underage drinking. Aided and abetted by the very adults charged with their safety, teens too often confuse celebration with intoxication, leaving them at risk for the serious consequences associated with adolescents and alcohol.

Driving adult America's enabling of underage drinking is a profound lack of awareness of its costs and the physical, social, and emotional toll it takes on teens.

The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine of the National Academies report *Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility* notes a disturbing trend of adult procurement of alcohol for teens. Moreover, it points to the resulting \$53 billion a year in losses from traffic deaths, violent crime, and other destructive behavior.

Here are the facts about youth and alcohol.

- The younger a child is when he starts to drink, the higher the chances he will have alcohol-related problems later in life.
- Alcohol use by teens affects still-developing cognitive abilities and impairs memory and learning.
- Teens who drink are more likely to commit or be the victims of violence (including sexual assault) and to experience depression and suicidal thoughts.
- Alcohol-related automobile crashes kill thousands of teens each year and injure millions more.

It's also a fact that young people use alcohol more frequently, and more heavily, than all other drugs combined. *Teens Today* research from SADD and Liberty Mutual Group reveals that drinking increases significantly between the 6th and 7th grades; that the average age for teens to start drinking is thirteen years old; and that by 12th grade, more than three in four teens are drinking.

Unfortunately, many young people fall prey to the "Myth of Invincibility," believing that there are no real, or lasting, effects of alcohol use. They're wrong.

In turn, many of their parents subscribe to the “Myth of Inevitability,” convinced that drinking is a rite of passage and that there’s not much they can do to influence their child’s choices (according to *Teens Today*, more than half of parents believe that “drinking is part of growing up” and teens “will drink no matter what”).

They’re wrong, too.

- More than a third of middle and high school students say they have not consumed alcohol.
- Parents who talk with their teens about underage drinking, set expectations, and enforce consequences are significantly less likely to have children who drink.

Still, a plethora of house parties dotting the path home from graduation reveals a commonly held view among adults that allowing teens to drink in private homes will keep them safe. It won’t. Anyway, what gives the parent of one child the right to decide for the parent of another that such behavior is harmless and appropriate?

An angry mother said, “I thought it was enough to make sure the parents would be home and supervising. It never occurred to me I had to ask if they were going to let the kids drink.”

But the undermining doesn’t stop there. Young people who would otherwise choose not to drink face a dilemma when adults make the offer. As one teen put it, “They don’t even give us a chance to make the right decisions.”

The legal and ethical ramifications of allowing or facilitating underage drinking are enormous – and fortunately not lost on a growing number of states beefing up prosecution of complicit adults. But, not until *all* segments of our society – including the parents who make the rules and supervise the teens – speak with one, clear, unambiguous voice about the perils of underage drinking will we successfully shatter the myths of invincibility and inevitability that propel it.

The best way to honor teens at graduation is to help them safely celebrate their achievement. Hosting alcohol-free parties, clearly communicating expectations for personal behavior, and enforcing consequences for violating the rules are just a few good ways to start.

The graduates have done their work. Now it is time to do ours.

Stephen Wallace, national chairman and chief executive officer of SADD, Inc. (Students Against Destructive Decisions), has broad experience as a school psychologist and adolescent counselor. He is the author of the new book, *Reality Gap, Alcohol, Drugs, and Sex, What Parents Don’t Know and Teens Aren’t Telling*, now available for pre-order on BarnesandNoble.com.



Staying Safe During Prom and Graduation Season

Tips for Parents From SADD Students

If your teen asks to attend a party ...

- ⇒ Clearly express to your teen your views about appropriate behavior.
- ⇒ Continue talking even if your teen is resistant to the conversation; studies have shown that parental input and voices are powerful influences on teen behavior.
- ⇒ Talk to other parents who are involved with the party. Ensure that there will be adequate supervision.
- ⇒ Ask your teen questions. He or she will ask to attend, so you need to ask for details. Where is the event? What will you be doing? Will there be alcohol or drug use?
- ⇒ Sign a Contract for Life (available at www.SADD.org) and always ensure the lines of communication are open.

It's the Law –

Massachusetts Social Host Responsibility Law

It is illegal for anyone to supply alcohol for a person younger than 21 years of age. In the Bay State, punishment may include a fine up to \$2,000 or imprisonment up to one year, or both. Under the Social Host Law, parents who own or control a property become responsible for the actions of individuals at the party.

Fun Safe Activities

- *Dance Dance Revolution*
- *Card Games*
- *Guitar Hero*
- *Bowling*
- *Dance Contest*
- *Watching Movies*
- *Competition Activities*
- *Ping-Pong*
- *Games with Prizes or Gifts*
- *Food and Laughter – homemade goods are always a favorite*

Help your teen by hosting a party ...

- ⇒ Create a guest list with your teen and make the party “invitation only.” Provide a phone number so parents can verify that the party is acceptable for their son or daughter.
- ⇒ Make sure guests are aware it is a “safe” party and that alcohol or drug use will not be tolerated. Post a sign for guests that it is a substance-free event.
- ⇒ Plan games in advance with your teen. Many problems arise when teens are “bored” and need a fulfilling activity.
- ⇒ If adults who will be attending will be drinking, make sure expectations are established and that the adults act as responsible role models.